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PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FOR LEADERSHIP IN FOREIGN TRADE

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THERE was a time when Americans held undisputed leadership in foreign trade. That was in the golden era when the clipper ships of Salem and Marblehead carried the American flag to the Orient and to lands south of the equator and exchanged American goods for exotic products. The energetic young men of the Atlantic seaboard looked to the ocean for their careers and by their ability and industry enriched themselves and brought prosperity, if not affluence, to Yankee ports. They learned their business through the direct method—in the school of experience, under the guidance of shrewd and far-seeing men who had personally developed the ocean trade. They were masters of every phase of the business, for their success depended upon their own skill; their responsibilities could neither be transferred nor avoided.

We delight to dwell on the exploits of those glorious days, but at this time we may allow ourselves to consider them only to see what we can learn from them. We are concerned not with history and legend, but with precepts and pedagogic principles. And we can learn much from a study of the ways of the clipper merchants—much that may help us to map out our college programs and direct the study of modern merchants.

The foreign trader of the early nineteenth century began his career as a boy; the community into which he was born was dependent for its very existence on overseas commerce and nature all but placed the boy in the forecabin, from which his innate qualities for leadership soon put him on the quarter deck. He had no assistance from chambers of commerce or international banks, little help from large business houses and slight backing from his government; he had to rely upon his own ability in selecting his cargo for export, in transporting it to the antipodes, in finding his market and exchanging his goods for goods to be sold at a profit in America. No cable

service enabled him to seek advice in advance or refer difficult questions to the home firm. He must himself decide all matters and must therefore be a real master of every detail of his profession.

One reason for our retrogression in foreign commerce has been that so few of our present generation have looked upon it as a life-work or have been able to acquire the complete professional knowledge that is so essential to success. They have seldom begun at an early age and devoted themselves to the study and practice of foreign commerce. In short, they have not become masters; there have been too few leaders and too little opportunity to get training for leadership. That deficiency we are now striving to overcome. The leaders in foreign trade, gathered at the seventh national foreign trade convention in San Francisco last May, in the final declaration of the convention spoke as follows regarding scientific educational preparation for foreign trade:

Only in such measure as we equip our business agents and official representatives with accurate knowledge of foreign markets, with practical knowledge of foreign languages and with a wide knowledge of the economic, social and political conditions prevailing among the peoples of other lands, may we expect them effectively to represent us in official life or successfully promote the expansion of our commerce.

The convention, therefore, emphasizes the need of scientific educational preparation for overseas commerce by which the youth of the land may be fitted to cope with, and solve intelligently the problems growing out of our increased participation in international affairs. Such training is an essential and fundamental factor in any successful foreign trade policy.

Many agencies are taking part in the effort to provide professional training. The government is publishing books and documents and suggested courses of study. Influential social and commercial organizations, like the National Foreign Trade Council and the Academy of Political Science, are procuring and publishing material of inestimable value to the student. Great banks are conducting classes for their own employees and issuing valuable literature to help others. Scores of magazines and newspapers are devoted either entirely or in part to advancing the interests of the foreign trader. And last, as is usually the case, our schools and colleges have realized something of the need, and are offering courses of widely differing value, but all intended to make available some degree of training for the young man who turns to foreign commerce.

If we are to have professional training on a par with that for other careers, the place for it is in the schools. That is the custom of America from which we cannot well depart. The banks and business houses may continue to give specialized training to their own employees, but they have a right to ask that the fundamentals shall be taught in the schools and colleges which claim to provide for the educational needs of the generation. Recognizing this fact, there has been a general attempt to meet the demand, but the schools have found the problem a difficult one. They have not known just what to teach nor where to find the teachers, and in consequence many of the courses of study might remind one of the optimistic suggestion of the ship-wrecked sailor, "If we had some eggs, we could have some ham and eggs, if we had the ham." Lacking the empirical ham and the pedagogic eggs, the programs presented by some institutions have not provided nutriment sufficient to arouse unbounded enthusiasm. The schools, I hasten to say—for I am a school man and jealous of the good name of our institutions of learning—the schools are not to blame. They could not make bricks without straw. They were like ships sailing in the fog with the hope of being saved from accident rather by the beneficence of Providence than by virtue of their own efforts. They lacked even the compass and the chart and but dimly realized to what port they were bound.

A comparison of the courses of study in foreign trade, as presented in leading American colleges and universities, shows that instruction is being given in methods of selling American goods abroad—something of advertising and creating a demand; that the paper-work—foreign trade technique—has an important place; that foreign exchange and foreign credits are studied. There are courses in ocean transportation, methods of shipping goods, in foreign tariffs and foreign markets. All these things are, of course, necessary. Some opportunity is given to study foreign languages, although here the courses are often glaringly superficial. Our American business men are weak in languages and that weakness too frequently is fatal. A few days ago I saw in Havana a circular issued by an American automobile manufacturer. It was a beautiful specimen of the printer's art, but its language attracted much more atten-

tion than did its artistic quality. The automobile was designated, on the cover, as "El Carro de Lujuría"—obviously an attempt at calling it "The Car of Luxury." One need only consult a Spanish dictionary and note that "lujuría" means, not *luxury*, but *lust*, to realize somewhat of the effect of that label on the mind of the prospective customer.

Americans are not alone in their faulty use of a foreign language; we are all familiar with the bad English sometimes used by foreigners, but it seems to be particularly difficult to induce an American to believe that facility and felicity in the use of Spanish or French or Swedish is of first importance for the man who desires to deal with the people speaking those languages. Such facility cannot be acquired in a course of twenty lessons without a master, nor even in a college course of two hours a week for one or two years.

If I may criticize the courses of study generally offered in colleges, I would point out that they largely look in one direction—that of selling American products; they give little thought to the other and equally important side of the business—the purchase and importing of foreign goods, without which *trade* cannot exist.

But the most serious lack lies in the failure to provide the "accurate knowledge of foreign markets, practical knowledge of foreign languages and wide knowledge of the economic, social and political conditions prevailing among the people of other lands", to quote from the final declaration of the foreign trade convention to which reference has already been made. A brief study of foreign markets does not give this wide and practical knowledge which is recognized as a necessity. The college course of study for students of foreign trade should present much more of history, literature and foreign political conditions than is yet offered in any American institution. We are woefully ignorant of the history and literature of other lands. Except at points where foreign countries have come into direct contact with the United States, we have in our schools ordinarily ignored their history if not their very existence and too frequently our textbooks have considered these points of contact only with the purpose of claiming for the United States a degree of glory and of ability which is not always recognized by the other party to the contact.

Our young men cannot become leaders in work which involves at every point contact with other peoples unless they are in every way familiar with the manner of thought as well as the manner of doing business which prevail among other peoples. Much might be learned from the immigrants in our land, if some method were provided by which our students should come into personal relations with these representatives of foreign countries although that, of course, could not be equal in value to a study of the foreigner in his own home.

The obvious fault of nearly every school course—that it lacks authority and accuracy in content—I pass over, since that is a condition which is being corrected as rapidly as competent instructors can be obtained; they were almost non-existent even five years ago. Today, not many, but a few of our best college instructors are in the departments of foreign trade.

Professional training is properly the work of schools, both of secondary and of college grade, but we may profitably consider the methods of training adopted in the largest and most successful business houses engaged in export and import. Many of these houses have organized classes and courses of study more than equal to the offerings of the average college or school of commerce, but in every case they recognize that the training cannot be complete until the employee has had opportunity to live and do business in the particular foreign field for which he is being trained. After a period of intensive study at home, the young man goes to a branch house across the ocean and there serves a real apprenticeship. He is encouraged to mingle with the people, to learn their language colloquially, even to marry—though Americans have never been as willing as are our old competitors, the Germans, to go to that extreme. In every foreign commercial center you may find a few resident Americans, representing the few great American business concerns which have become as important factors in the business of the world as in that of the United States.

It has been thought that the schools could not offer so complete a training, but the schools are not to be so surpassed in their natural function. Educators have begun to plan programs which combine the class-room courses with the plan of apprenticeship and foreign residence. In some cases, American colleges have affiliated themselves with foreign institutions and

worked out plans for an interchange of students, but there is so little similarity between the higher educational institutions of the United States and of other lands that this plan, full of interesting possibilities as it is, has not accomplished much. The very attempt to establish such affiliations may be considered an indication of ignorance of foreign conditions, since the programs and courses of study of the institutions in different countries make a common course well nigh impossible. To be of practical use to the American student, special provision would need to be made for Americans in foreign schools or for foreigners in the American schools.

One group of teachers has attempted to organize at Panama an international school where students from North and South America may meet for study of Pan-American trade. This experiment is yet too new to be given more than passing mention.

At Boston University we have taken a more decisive step for the professional training for leadership in foreign trade, particularly Latin-American trade. Boston University has established in Havana, Cuba, a complete college of business administration as a branch of the College of Business Administration in Boston. The branch in Havana and the college in Boston offer identical courses of study leading to the same degree; they are under the control of the same faculty and the same trustees; and students may transfer from one to the other without change of course or loss of time. In Boston, the courses are, naturally, offered in English, except that a number of elective courses are given in Spanish, largely for the special benefit of students who are preparing to transfer to Havana for a year or more; in Havana, on the other hand, Spanish is the medium of instruction, although special emphasis is laid upon the study of English. An American student may spend his first year or two years in Boston and then may complete his course in Havana, having the opportunity to learn the language where it is native and to live among the people of a foreign land. A Cuban student may in the same way spend a year or more in Havana and may then go to Boston to complete his course. In either case, the course includes several subjects of special preparatory nature, and calls for a period of actual business practice under the supervision of the college before the degree is granted.

The success of this venture, which is enthusiastically supported by Cuban business men, educators and government officials, points the way to a world-wide university with branches in many lands. Already Boston University has planned another branch in China—a country that we ought to know far better than we do. Steps have been taken to go to other countries, so that the student will have a wide range of choice for his foreign residence and may, indeed, include two different countries in his four-year course.

The student who is specializing in foreign trade with the expectation of transferring to one of the foreign branches of the college for a part of his course, takes in addition to the standard foreign trade subjects much more complete work in the foreign languages of his specialty and a detailed study of the history, literature and general economic conditions of the country to which he is going. With that as a background, he should be able in a year of residence abroad to acquire a sympathetic familiarity which will stand him in good stead in all his dealings. Through the specializing for trade with one country, he may seem to be narrowing his field of activity, but that is not the fact. Once break through the egotistical shell which so commonly surrounds our people—once bring fully the realization that even in one other nation there are men of ability and honor whose customs, although different from ours, are by no means to be ridiculed—once let our chauvinistic young men understand that they can really learn something from foreign peoples—and that part of their education will not cease until it has included the important countries of the world. Japan may be more different from Italy than Italy is from the United States, yet the young American who has lived for awhile in Italy and gained some of the lessons which must be gained from such experience, will have a closer appreciation of Japan and of other foreign lands than would be possible had he never been beyond the borders of America.

Americans of the present generation need to learn that America, though the land of the brave and the home of the free, is not in all things superior to every other land. As a people we suffer sadly from megalomania—perhaps from megacephalia. I fear that our participation in the World War has not reduced this tendency. Nothing is more enlightening than

residence abroad; travel is helpful, but the tourist sees but little; a considerable period of residence among people of a different nationality is necessary. Perhaps our foreign commerce has been retarded more by the unpardonable assumption of superiority on the part of untraveled Americans than by any other one factor. If we are to train our young men for leadership, we must send them abroad, and how can that be better done than to include a year or more of foreign life in their college course?

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